# *Once Upon a Time... Life*

***Once Upon a Time... Life*** (French: *Il était une fois... La vie*)[a] is an educational animated television series created and directed by Albert Barillé. It is the third series in the *Once Upon a Time...* franchise. It reprises the main characters from its predecessors, *Once Upon a Time... Man* and *Once Upon a Time... Space*, and adapts them into a physiology context, talking about the human body and its functions in a simplified and educational way. The series consists of 26 episodes.

The series was produced by French studio Procidis in co-production with FR3 and Canal+ (France), Société Radio-Canada (Canada), Televisión Española (TVE, Spain), Katholieke Radio Omroep (KRO, Netherlands), Radio Télévision Suisse Romande and Radiotelevisione della Svizzera Italiana (Switzerland), Radio-télévision belge de la Communauté française and Belgische Radio en Televisie Nederlandse Uitzendingen (RTBF and BRT, Belgium), and Eiken (Japan) who was the one who made the animation. The series premiered in France on Canal+, between 13 September 1987 and 13 March 1988, and it was subsequently broadcast on the channels of the rest of the broadcasters that participated in the production dubbed into their own language.

This is the second collaboration between Procidis and the Japanese studio Eiken subsequent to *Once Upon a Time... Space* and is thus, considered as an anime. However, unlike the previous series, this was never aired on television in Japan but instead was released on VHS in 1991.[1]

## Overview

*Once Upon a Time... Life* brought back the edutainment formula that has *Once Upon a Time... Man* but that had been left out on *Once Upon a Time... Space*. The series combined entertaining story lines with factual information, presented metaphorically.

The series used the same recurring lead characters as the other series in the *Once Upon a Time...* franchise: certain represent the cells that make up the body's systems and defense mechanisms, such as red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets, while antagonists represent viruses and bacteria that threaten to attack the human body. Every episode of the series featured a different organ or system within the human body (like the brain, the heart, the circulatory system, etc.).

In addition to its countries of origin, the series was also aired in the Arab states of the Persian Gulf, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Chile, Croatia, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, Gabon, Germany, Greece, Haiti, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kenya, Liechtenstein, Mauritius, Mexico, Morocco, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the Soviet Union, Senegal, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, the United Kingdom, Venezuela, Yugoslavia, and Zimbabwe.

## Music

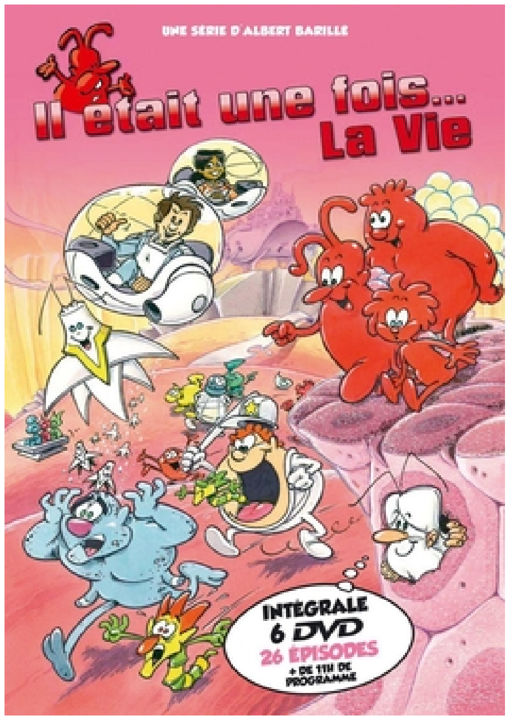
The opening theme song of the serie is "*L'hymne à la vie*" (French for "hymn for life") composed by Michel Legrand. It is performed in the original French-language version of the series by Sandra Kim,[2] winner of the Eurovision Song Contest 1986.[3] In the English-language dub, its lyrics were translated and was retitled as "This life is life that's life".[4]

## Characters

The series makes use of recurring human characters originally from both *Once Upon a Time... Man* and *Once Upon a Time... Space*. Every character in the series appeared as a real person (the old intelligent doctor, the dedicated blonde mother, the boy and the girl, their obese friend, and the pair of bullies) and anthropomorphic representations of cells and cellular functions within the human body.

- **The manager of the brain** – represented by Maestro, the bearded old man.
- **The manager of the cell nucleus** – represented by Maestro, usually asleep in his chair.
- **Enzymes** – The human body's workmen, shown usually as a man in a bib overall and a baseball-type cap.
  - ***Digestive enzymes*** - Works of digestion. Some enzymes are shown as female and most as male. The females are only seen in the stomach. The males appear in the stomach and small intestine.
- **Hormones** – messengers for the body, represented as humanoid robotic outboard motors spray-painted according to function;

***Once Upon a Time... Life***




DVD box set cover art

| | |
|---|---|
| **French** | *Il était une fois... La vie* |
| **Genre** | Edutainment<br>Animation |
| **Created by** | Albert Barillé |
| **Voices of** | Roger Carel<br>Marie-Laure Beneston<br>Gilles Laurent<br>Gilles Tamiz<br>Alain Dorval |
| **Composer** | Michel Legrand |
| **Country of origin** | **List** [show] |
| **Original language** | French |
| **No. of episodes** | 26 |
| **Production** | |
| **Running time** | 26 minutes |

those representing thyroxine are given life by iodine. These hormones are all female.

- **Red blood cells** – represented by red humanoids. Most notable is elderly Professor Globus, who tells a lot about how the body works; he is accompanied by dimwitted big boy called Hemo; and his inquisitive and mischievous friend Globin. They can be pink colored when they carry oxygen bubbles or carbon dioxide bubbles in a back pouch, becoming dark red when carrying carbon dioxide.

| Production companies | List | [show] |
|---|---|---|
| **Original release** | | |
| **Network** | Canal+ | |
| **Release** | 13 September 1987 – 13 March 1988 | |
| **Related** | | |
| *Once Upon a Time... Space* (1982)<br>*Once Upon a Time... The Americas* (1992) | | |

- **Neurotransmitters**-The blue speedy guys that can deliver messages as papers or passengers through nerves and stations. They are mostly running anytime on delivery, and pick up or drop off passenger times until they reach the end.
- **Platelets** – represented as red disks with a face, legs and arms.
- **White blood cells** – The body's police force.
  - ***Neutrophil granulocytes*** – represented by foot-patrol "policemen" which are completely white in color, and wear a yellow star badge. They carry batons and swallow any bacterias that they find. They can clone themselves. Most of the time they function as traffic cops. Their commander is the same but with a Caucasian head, and is named Jumbo or Jumbo Junior.
  - **Lymphocytes** – represented by:
    - ***Lymphocytes B*** – as marshals in a small one-man round flying craft with two aimable side-mounted hydrojet propulsors; two of them are a version of Peter and Psi (named Captain Peter and Lieutenant Claire). Some other (unnamed) B cell pilot characters each appear more than once, for example a spotty-faced teenage boy. They can drop antibodies from an underbelly bomb bay. They can multiplicate themselves through mitosis duplicating the craft and the pilot. Their uniforms are very light blue with shoulder pads. (Those uniforms appear in the outside world in a few futuristic scenes as astronaut uniforms/undersuits.)
    - ***Lymphocytes T*** – the same sort of craft but with a large uppercase T on the underbelly at the bow. They can discharge a purple smoke that kills bacteria and cancer cells.
  - ***Phagocyte*** – hovering spherical craft with several large suction tubes coming out of them. A pilot's head can be seen through a small canopy on top. They can engulf bacteria.

- *Basophils* – plump women with body like granulocytes, who instead of swallow bacterias carry a basket of "histamine grenades" and throw them to attack toxins.
- *Macrophages* – (a big yellow ground vehicles shaped like frog heads with a big front scoop grab and three wheels; each "eye" is a small canopy revealing a pilot's head), "the cleaning services of the body". Most of the time they function by removing the body' waste and during emergency times they phagocyte bacteria and viruses.
- Immature leucocytes: teenage humanoids with the same uniform as the lymphocyte B pilots: seen in the thymus, which is represented as a police training college.

- **The antibodies** – a small white insectoid characters which after being launched at infectious agents, fly around the bacteria or viruses and paralyze them. Their commander is named Metro.
- **The Pathogens** are the main antagonists of the series. They are the characters that make people sick. The other antagonists are the Immature leukocytes in Bone Marrow,
  - ***The bacteria*** (represented as blue bullies) – the big bully. Mostly blue in color.
  - ***The viruses*** (represented as yellow worms with hands) – the smaller bully. Mostly yellow in color.
- **Organic molecules**, which are represented in two cases as characters.
  - *Fats/Fatty acids*: Represented as fat yellow ponies.
  - *Proteins* : Represented as a tall, strong, and muscular orange character in overalls with some doglike features.
  - *Sugars* : Small green-and-purple hexagons and pentagons. Sometimes appear as candylike characters.
  - *Amino acids* : Similar appearance to antibodies, generally invisible until the episode dealing with protein synthesis.
  - *DNA/RNA* : Represented quite accurately and in detail when explaining protein synthesis.
  - *Vitamins* : Represented as colored living letters. As seen in the lymphatic system, P is present but rarely.
  - *Cholesterol* : Yellow seal-like characters that can block a passage of a blood vessel. As seen in *"The liver factory"*, the cholesterol accumulated around Jumbo, blocking the passage of the red blood cells in the blood vessel.
- **Gall/Bile** : Blue-green-colored liquid that makes the fats shrink, as seen in *"The digestion"*.

The series describes a "society inside the body" with a strong pyramidal stratification of work.[5]

## Episodes

| No. | Title | Original release date |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | "The Cell Planet"<br>(*La planète cellule*) | 13 September 1987 |
| On the cells and the DNA. | | |
| 2 | "Birth"<br>(*La naissance*) | 20 September 1987 |
| On the reproductive system, pregnancy, and birth. | | |
| 3 | "The Body's Sentinels"<br>(*Les sentinelles du corps*) | 27 September 1987 |
| On the white blood cells and the immune system. | | |
| 4 | "The Bone Marrow"<br>(*La moelle osseuse*) | 4 October 1987 |
| On the bone marrow and the haematopoietic system. | | |
| 5 | "The Blood"<br>(*Le sang*) | 11 October 1987 |
| On the blood and the circulatory system. | | |
| 6 | "The Tiny Platelets"<br>(*Les petites plaquettes*) | 18 October 1987 |
| On the platelets and the hemostasis. | | |
| 7 | "The Heart"<br>(*Le cœur*) | 25 October 1987 |
| On the heart. | | |
| 8 | "Breathing"<br>(*La respiration*) | 1 November 1987 |
| On the respiratory system. | | |
| 9 | "The Brain"<br>(*Le cerveau*) | 8 November 1987 |
| On the brain. | | |
| 10 | "The Neurones"<br>(*Les neurones*) | 15 November 1987 |
| On the neurones and the nervous system. | | |
| 11 | "The Eye"<br>(*L'œil*) | 22 November 1987 |
| On the eye and the visual system. | | |
| 12 | "The Ear"<br>(*L'oreille*) | 29 November 1987 |

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|---|---|---|
| On the ear, the hearing, and the vestibular system. | | |
| 13 | "The Skin"<br>(*La peau*) | 6 December 1987 |
| On the skin and the integumentary system. | | |
| 14 | "The Mouth and the Teeth"<br>(*La bouche et les dents*) | 13 December 1987 |
| On the mouth and the teeth. | | |
| 15 | "The Digestion"<br>(*La digestion*) | 20 December 1987 |
| On the digestive system. | | |
| 16 | "The Liver Factory"<br>(*L'usine du foie*) | 27 December 1987 |
| On the liver. | | |
| 17 | "The Kidneys"<br>(*Les reins*) | 3 January 1988 |
| On the kidneys and the urinary system. | | |
| 18 | "The Lymphatic System"<br>(*Le système lymphatique*) | 10 January 1988 |
| On the lymphatic system. | | |
| 19 | "The Bones and the Skeleton"<br>(*Les os et le squelette*) | 17 January 1988 |
| On the bones and the skeleton. | | |
| 20 | "The Muscles and the Fat"<br>(*Les muscles et la graisse*) | 24 January 1988 |
| On the muscular system and the fat. | | |
| 21 | "Toxin Wars"<br>(*Guerre aux toxines*) | 31 January 1988 |
| On the microbes and the antibodies. | | |
| 22 | "The Vaccination"<br>(*La vaccination*) | 7 February 1988 |
| On the vaccination and immunization. | | |
| 23 | "The Hormones"<br>(*Les hormones*) | 14 February 1988 |
| On the hormones and the endocrine system. | | |
| 24 | "The Chain of Life"<br>(*Les chaînes de la vie*) | 21 February 1988 |
| On the food chain. | | |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 25 | "Repairs and Changes"<br>(*Réparations et transformations*) | 28 February 1988 |
| On regeneration. | | |
| 26 | "And Life Goes On"<br>(*Et la vie va...*) | 13 March 1988 |
| On ageing and death. | | |

## Regional home-video releases

In some English-language versions, the title is rendered as "Once Upon a Time – Life" in the opening credits.

A partwork version called *How My Body Works* was produced for the United Kingdom in 50 hardback volumes, each with about 30 A4-sized pages, described as "an Orbis play & learn collection". In it, some of the characters have different names: The Professor for the Maestro; Captain Courageous and Ace for the lymphocyte B crafts' pilots; Plasmus and Globina for Hemo and Globin, Corpo for Jumbo; Toxicus, Germus and Infectius for the bacterium characters; Virulus for the virus character. VHS copies of the English-language television episodes were included with issues.

A DVD box set of all the episodes of the series was produced by Procidis, and distributed locally by various distributors.[6] The DVD series was produced in French, English, Polish, Finnish, German, Italian, Hebrew, Norwegian, Hungarian, Dutch and Swedish, but was not released in the United Kingdom. In 2011, the DVD box set was available in English in Canada, distributed by Imavision.

Full episodes are available on Youtube.[7]

## Biological accuracy

Most biological terminology is translated with care, but a few mistakes were made and there are some anachronisms.

- The heart chamber now known as the atrium is called the "auricle" in episode 7, a term correct at the time of production, but which is now used for another structure in the heart.
- In episode 4, "Pulmonary aorta" is used for "pulmonary artery", which is a mistake because unlike fish, humans do not have two aortae.
- More inaccuracies include complete lack of antigen presenting cell activity (by Macrophages, B-cells and Dendritic cells) in order to trigger the adaptive immune system according to MHCII complex. Though it is mentioned that antibodies need to be specific to the disease's pathogen,

the way that specificity is obtained is not shown. Also, some aspects of the immune system are not portrayed, like the complement system.

- In episode 11, it is explained that lysosomes are found in tears to protect and clean the eye surface, but the correct term are the lysozymes.
- In episode 13, when professor Globus explains the receptors of the skin, the Meissner's corpuscle is mentioned as Golgi corpuscle, a cell organelle responsible for protein transportation.

## See also

- List of French animated television series
- List of French television series
- *Osmosis Jones*, a 2001 American film with a similar premise
- *Cells at Work!*, a 2015 manga series with a similar premise
- Fantastic Voyage
- Innerspace

## Notes

a. Known in Japan as ***The Science of Life: Micro Patrol*** (Japanese: 生命の科学ミクロパトロール, Hepburn: *Seimei no Kagaku: Mikuro Patorōru*)

## References


1. "株式会社エイケン オフィシャルサイト" (https://eiken-anime.jp/works/%E7%94%9F%E5%91%BD%E3%81%AE%E7%A7%91%E5%AD%A6%E3%83%9F%E3%82%AF%E3%83%AD%E3%83%91%E3%83%88%E3%83%AD%E3%83%BC%E3%83%AB/) . *www.eiken-anime.jp* (in Japanese). Retrieved 2025-01-29.
2. Archived at Ghostarchive (https://ghostarchive.org/varchive/youtube/20211205/kNnpHAszq64) and the Wayback Machine (https://web.archive.org/web/20170825050205/https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNnpHAszq64&gl=US&hl=en) : "Il était une fois... La Vie - Le Générique" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kNnpHAszq64) . *YouTube*. 8 April 2017.
3. "Final of Bergen 1986" (https://eurovision.tv/event/bergen-1986/final) . European Broadcasting Union. Archived (https://web.archive.org/web/20210416103300/https://eurovision.tv/event/bergen-1986/final) from the original on 16 April 2021. Retrieved 16 April 2021.

4. Once Upon a Time... (Hello Maestro) (2011-03-30). *Once upon a time... Life - Opening Theme* (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=imP2MZxoM-s) . Retrieved 2025-01-29 – via YouTube.

5. Brodesco, Alberto (2011). "I've Got you under my Skin: Narratives of the Inner Body in Cinema and Television" (https://unitn.academia.edu/AlbertoBrodesco/Papers/824001/_Ive_Got_you_under_my_Skin_Narratives_of_the_Inner_Body_in_Cinema_and_Television_Nuncius._Journal_of_the_material_and_visual_history_of_science_vol._26_Ways_of_Voyaging_Through_the_Human_Body_2011_pp._201-221) . *Nuncius: Journal of the Material and Visual History of Science*. **26** (1): 214. doi:10.1163/182539111x569829 (https://doi.org/10.1163%2F182539111x569829) . PMID 21936210 (https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/21936210) . Retrieved 24 August 2012.

6. "Procidis - Collection DVD" (https://web.archive.org/web/20071016044547/http://www.procidis.com/gb/collection/d_dvd.html) . Archived from the original (http://www.procidis.com/gb/collection/d_dvd.html) on 2007-10-16. Retrieved 2007-10-21.

7. "Once Upon a time... Life" (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLKnJDcjkfEp0AEalF2mrq-wOSX8jCAMnz) . *YouTube*. Retrieved 2025-01-29.

# External links

- Official website (http://www.hellomaestro.fr/home.html) - series producer
- *Once Upon a Time... Life* (https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0284735/) at IMDb
- *Seimei no Kagaku Micro Patrol* (https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/encyclopedia/anime.php?id=11517) (anime) at Anime News Network's encyclopedia
- Hello Maestro (https://www.youtube.com/user/onceuponatimechannel/about) at *YouTube*

**Portals:** Science Biology Medicine Television Animation 1980s France